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THE RELIGIOUS ELEMENT IN ETHICAL CODES.

THE assumptions we here make are such as will be readily admitted. The first is that man is a moral being. No matter what account may be given of the origin of the idea of moral distinction and obligation, it will be allowed that it exists among men in the earliest period at which we can begin to trace a human development. In its earliest stages it is no doubt rudimentary; nevertheless, it exists and grows. It is even possible that it may be found in the lower animals; but whether this be so or not, conscience is a human possession. Looking at the history of the race as a whole we may call it a necessary factor in human life, with a varied history and changing fortunes like all other elements of human life, playing its part according to its surroundings, but never failing to make itself felt. It is only by such a survey of its past that its present value in the world can be properly estimated.

The second assumption is that man is a religious being. It is possible that here and there a tribe may be found without recognizable religious conceptions. This is by no means proved,—the reports of passing travellers must be received with great caution; but if it should be proved it would not practically affect our assumption; the immense majority of men have recognized the presence and power of some supernatural agency in their lives, and all our great civilizations have been built up on the foundation of religion. And by religion I here mean the belief in and practical recognition of some sort of personal agency and influence in life distinct from human activity proper. We are not called on here to account for the origin of religion. It is enough that we can recognize it everywhere as a constantly changing yet ever present element of life, whose practical value for us cannot be estimated without a knowledge of the part it has played in the past.

Finally, we assume that social life, some sort of social organization, is the condition of all human progress, the foundation on which government, morality, religion, science, and art have been reared. Men are everywhere found living in communities, or, at any rate, we know of no advance in civilization under any other condition. Among all the lines of human progress a close connection must exist, since they all flow from the combined thought and action of the community,—each represents the total force of society acting on a particular point. This is not the less true because, as appears to be the fact, each particular branch of human effort is conducted mainly by some special circle, which on its own line is in advance of the rest of the community; any such special circle nevertheless draws its material and its inspiration from the instinct, feeling, thought, and effort of the whole society. The life of the world has actually been a communal life. History shows that advance has been in inverse proportion to isolation, that it has been great in proportion as the barriers between individuals, tribes, and nations have been broken down, and free play given to human effort of all kinds, whose largest development is possible as it seems only under the stimulation of social needs and the capacities of social combinations. If this has been the law in the past, we can only assume that it will be the law in the future. And if we find that certain general tendencies have persistently prevailed in human life up to the present day we may take it as a rational principle of practical belief and action that such tendencies will continue to exist and may be lawfully accepted as a basis for our scheme of life.

With these assumptions, then, we may proceed to inquire into the actual historical relations which have existed between ethics and religion so far as these can be made out with reasonable clearness from the material at our disposal.

I.

Between all paths of human progress, as has been said, there must be an intimate relation; but certain characteristics of early social organization make the connection between

religion and ethics in primitive stages of human life peculiarly close and effective. I do not mean here to go back to the very earliest traceable form of society. The social principles of the lowest savage life cannot be said to be well understood ; while many facts have been collected, there is still a good deal of uncertainty about the ideas of the undeveloped races. And, as we may assume a general social-moral progress, it will not affect our investigation if we begin at a point where some definiteness of moral-religious conception is discernible.

One of the earliest stadia of life is that which is known as the clan-constitution of society, a condition in which a comparatively small collection of individuals and households is the unit of organization and action. This is a recognizable phase of society, whatever be its relation to family life. There is good reason in fact to believe that the clan preceded the family as the unit of organized life. There must indeed have been from the beginning some sort of union like that which we call the family, some sort of cohabitation of parents and children, or at least of mother and children. Recent researches, as is well known, have made it probable that the matriarchal form of society was earlier than the patriarchal ; the mother was at first the head of the household, the father being a subordinate and often an indefinite and unimportant element. In such a state of things that tender and refined affection which we regard as the essence of family life could have no existence. But, in addition, there are many facts going to prove that the family had not at this time a real unitary character, since in all important questions of conduct it was the relation of the man to the clan and not to the family that determined his position. The family must be looked on as a unit destined to exert a profound influence but slow of growth, remaining a long time in a crude form. Clan-life meets us in all parts of the world, in the village-community of India and Russia, in the petty tribes of the Arabian desert and of North America, in the rude societies of Africa and Polynesia. Two facts of great importance for all succeeding human history appear on the surface of these primitive societies.

The first of these facts relates to the moral attitude of the

clansman. His ethical ideas are determined by the ideas of the community,—that is, by the customs which have grown up in the course of generations through the interplay of moral-social forces. This point of view indeed is not peculiar to early society,—we find it in all stages of life up to our own time; but in the primitive period it is especially definite and effective, going so far as practically to exclude individual judgment. The man knew no interests outside of his community. His clansmen were his friends and helpers in hunting and in war, and all the world beside was his enemy. His feeling for his clansmen was instinctive rather than rational,—it was like that of the child for the persons whom it sees daily and on whom it depends for its comfort. He has lived himself into relations with his clan-surroundings; he has neither intellectual nor moral force sufficient to project himself out of this area, and adjust himself to and find peace and comfort in a wider sphere of relations. His whole life depends on his being in harmony with his fellow-tribesmen. The basis of conduct for him is the combined action of the community. Any moral question under such circumstances will be decided by its relation to the communal life. It is right and meritorious to take the property of a hostile tribe, while to take what belonged to one of his own tribesmen is a crime. The term “steal” is thus defined by the conditions of society as appropriating the property of a fellow-clansman. Homicide is lawful if the victim is an alien, the right to kill in such a case being modified only by fear of the consequences which the slaughter may entail on the clan through the revenge of the enemy; but the slaying of a fellow-tribesman is looked on as a wrong done to the whole community, and it is by the whole community that the punishment is inflicted. This communal form of execution prevailed among the old Israelites in certain cases as late as the seventh century B.C.; a man convicted of idolatry is to be brought to a public place and there “the hand of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death and afterward the hand of all the people” (Deut. xvii. 7). The blood of a kinsman—that is, of a clansman—was sacred, but no other blood. The same principle

held in regard to the obligation of truthfulness, the right to enslave men, and generally of all moral questions. The man's outlook did not reach beyond the circle in which he felt that his personality was bound up. There is a close similarity between this conception of ethics and that of a modern gang of thieves. There is honor among thieves,—their controlling principle of organization is that it is dishonorable for one member to betray the gang or to act solely in his own interests. Each is required to subordinate himself entirely to the life of his community. Individual vengeance is not permitted; punishment is inflicted on a recreant member by the whole body. It is lawful and honorable for a member to appropriate the property of an alien; it is a crime to appropriate the property of one's fellow-thief. In both these cases the ethical code is determined by the exigencies of a closed community, and in both conscience is communal and not individual. They differ in that the modern clan is in one sense arbitrary and artificial in its constitution, its members having voluntarily associated themselves for the purpose of gaining a livelihood by appropriating the property of others, while the ancient clan grew up through natural conditions of blood kinship and contiguity, and gained a livelihood, partly at the expense of others, but partly also by the proper use of their own natural resources; and with this difference is closely connected the other, that the conscience of the modern clan is the product of a conscious isolation from a well-advanced body of existing ethical thought, while the conscience of the earlier community is a free development out of generally prevalent conditions of ancient life. I have chosen this parallel as a peculiarly strong illustration of how not only the ethical code but also the tone and constitution of conscience depends on the social conditions. Other illustrations, in some respects more precise, may sometimes be found in the ethical life of certain small natural communities, as a Highland clan of the present time, an English parish, an American rural settlement, a large family consisting of numerous households living in a modern city.

In all these cases the point with which we are here con-

cerned is the communal character of the ethical code and of the conscience. The individual has certain moral rules and moral principles, but these come to him by inheritance, are determined outside of himself, do not impose on him the necessity of personal moral decision or of grappling with moral problems. He accepts the law which is laid down for him by his community. His conscience is at peace so long as he has the approbation of his fellow-clansmen. It is not correct to say that conscience abdicates its throne, since at this period it had not yet assumed royal authority,—that is, there is no sign that in the earlier stages of human life it had assumed more definite shape or played a more important part. It is not autonomous or autocratic ; it recognizes a power above itself resident in a body of thought which has grown up unconsciously through a long period of free interplay of human instincts and desires. Two characteristics of such a conscience are clearly visible ; the first is that it is under effective control, in such a way that the destructive or disorganizing impulses of the individual are held in check by the combined thought and impulse of the community, and a free and peaceful life is maintained, which allows the individual to strive comparatively untrammelled for the attainment of his ideals ; the second is that this control of the individual by the general conscience is substantially unconscious, being not attended by a distinct formulation of moral principles and a voluntary recognition of something accepted by the intellect as the highest attainable.

It must be repeated that this early posture of conscience is not to be understood either in an absolute way or as something altogether peculiar to primeval life. It is not to be taken as absolutely excluding individualism in the formulation of moral judgments, since all life, so far as its springs are visible to us, necessarily arises out of individualism. Nor, on the other hand, is the ethical dependence on the authority of the community confined to early stages of history, but appears to some extent everywhere and always. All that is meant to be affirmed is that this relative depression of individual judgment is especially prominent and controlling in a certain stage of society.

The second characteristic fact in the clan period relates to the religious constitution of the society, and particularly to the position which the deity therein occupies. Our purpose does not lead us to inquire into the specific origin of men's ideas of supernatural agency, or into the genealogy of the earliest deities; no matter whence the deity came, it is certain that at the time with which we are dealing he is well developed and firmly established. Now it is a well-defined peculiarity of this early social constitution that the deity is regarded as a member of the clan. He is not a far-off god who intervenes only in extraordinary emergencies, and pronounces his decisions in an impersonal manner from a majestic, unapproachable throne. He is not a friend of humanity who distributes his favors and disfavours with an impartial eye to the general human good. He is not a spiritual power who manifests himself in the production of fine ethical tones and impulses. He is not merely an ally who may be expected to lend help against enemies and confer benefits with moderate promptness and fulness. He is more than this,—he is a fellow-clansman, sharing the blood and nature of his brethren, personally and keenly interested in all that concerns them, not different from them in his general ideas of life. His conceptions of right and wrong are theirs, for he has grown up with them and has taken part in the establishment of the ethical life. He, like every other member of the clan, is interested in the maintenance of what is held to be good order, and, as the most powerful member, is the most efficient guardian of order. Thus he comes to stand for the right. In process of time it is identified with his will and regarded as his ordination. The ethical code was thus necessarily religious in its whole extent,—both its material and its sanctions were inseparably connected with the person and conduct of the clan deity. He occupied the position of a resident chieftain, and the sense of his perpetual presence gave a human warmth and vividness to the ethical life, which was naturally dimmed in later times when the deity left his position as blood-kinsman and retired to some comparatively isolated divine community of his own.

For the proof that the god occupied this position in early times I must refer to the books (of Spencer, Tylor, Lubbock, Lang, Frazer, W. Robertson Smith, and others) in which the facts are collected. Totemism, which involves this conception of the deity, belongs indeed in its cruder form to an earlier stage of life than the one we are considering; but it survives in modified shape in the clan-organization, and definitely colors religious ideas. The original beast or plant or stone, which is the ancestor or kinsman of the clan, becomes in process of time a well-shaped deity who then takes his proper part in the social life. Thus the Greek *Lukaïos*, who was probably originally a wolf-god, was in later times identified with Zeus or with Apollo, and assumed more or less the moral qualities of those deities; and the similar Roman god *Lupercus*, who in the legend was associated with the founders of the city, changed his character according to advances in Roman religious conceptions. The idea of blood-kinship underlies also, we may suppose, those ancient feasts in which the gods were supposed to share; Livy's description of a *lectisternium* (v. 13) held on a very serious occasion makes the impression that the people regarded this communal eating as a pledge of divine friendship, and in the Hebrew ritual legislation (Lev. xxi. 6) the fire-offerings presented to Jehovah are called the "bread of God," an expression which must originally have implied that the deity partook of the offering as a friend and fellow-clansman. Among Semitic peoples many proper names describe the deity as the father, brother, or sister of the worshipper. Such facts as these are found in so many parts of the world that we seem to be warranted in assuming a phase of society in which the deity was a blood-kinsman and a member of the clan.

The two characteristics above mentioned are commonly found together; they belong to the same stadium of social development. The communal conception of ethics belongs in general to a condition of society in which the deity is regarded as united by the closest ties to the members of the community. On the one hand ethical law and authority reside in the whole society as the unit of life, and on the other hand,

the god, as the natural head of the community, controls the sanctions of the ethical code, and becomes the centre of the ethical life. The coexistence of these two facts is not accidental; both issue naturally out of the social conditions. Both mean depression of individuality and reliance on external authority. In this period the ethical code is comparatively unformed, the social isolation is great, and man's relation to the deity is conceived as humanly close and warm.

II.

Accepting the social condition just described as a fair starting-point in the history of religious ethical development, let us inquire into the conditions which have modified man's succeeding history. It is in man's history that his ethical religious endowments and capabilities are revealed; what he is we can know only from what he does; it is in the phenomena of life, as Aristotle points out, that we must seek the law of ethical progress. Man was cast forth into the world as a moral infant, ignorant of his surroundings and of his possibilities; it was by slow degrees that he came to know something of the powers of his own soul, and of the nature of the great system of things which his own thought construed, and which yet forced itself on him as a determining influence in his life. Let us now ask briefly what the conditions have been that have tended to modify the two characteristics above described.

I. Let us begin with the moral side of human life, the code and the conscience. We have seen that crudeness of code and childish dependence of conscience coexist,—they belong to the early period with which we began. History shows that in general these two features of life have been similarly modified in the progress of civilization; moral rules and principles have become clearer, broader, and higher, and conscience has more and more thrown off the bonds of external authority and learned to rely on itself. These are obvious and generally recognized facts, but it will be proper to look for a moment at their history.

The ethical progress of the world has been in proportion to

the destruction of isolation and the tightening of the bonds that have united man with man. In early life isolation of clan from clan, of tribe from tribe, of nation from nation, of continent from continent was the rule. For the old Hebrews and Greeks a foreign language was a "stammering tongue;" for all primitive tribes a stranger was an enemy; foreign customs and ideas were looked on not with scientific curiosity as new developments of human life, but with suspicion as things alien, incomprehensible; and presumably dangerous. Lack of experience produced deficiency in sympathy. The absence of material resources shut men up in their own narrow surroundings; there were no great world-roads, no quick methods of travelling, few mechanical means of taking men out of their little areas and forcing them into contact with their fellows far and near. Under such circumstances the moral code was an accommodation to a limited set of moral conditions.

The political history of the world presents a series of movements that shattered the older organizations and created larger social unities. The kingdom of David meant the crushing of the little Canaanite nationalities, and the Assyrian and Babylonian empires practically broke down the barriers that separated the various Semitic peoples from one another. Persia inherited this Semitic area and added to it Asia Minor and Egypt, and the Greek and Roman conquests made a unit of the whole civilized world except China and India. At a later time Islam repeated this history in Asia and Africa, welding together politically and religiously nations of diverse character in a way that proved wonderfully effective, so that in Bagdad, Damascus, Jerusalem, Cairo, and Cordova the traveller encountered the same philosophic, artistic, and literary culture, and felt at home in all the Moslem world. Europe had next to go through the same process, first by wars and military conquests, and then by the surer agencies of commerce; alongside of Charlemagne were the Crusades and the Hanseatic League, and the era of Napoleon was also that of steam. A long step has been taken towards making the world a social unit. It has become a natural and necessary thing for men to interest themselves in the affairs of all the peoples of the

earth, barbarous as well as civilized; a man now begins life with a tolerably distinct consciousness of the unity of the world, the sense that all its parts cohere and have a single aim. This feeling of unity is social, not political,—it regards the various areas of the world not as governmental masses but as human communities engaged in the working out of life, the problems being substantially the same everywhere. This feeling of comradeship, though no doubt greater now than ever before, may be traced through many past periods of human history, in the writings, for example, of men who have travelled and set down their impressions of what they saw with more or less of curiosity and sympathy and a feeling of brotherhood for foreign peoples. We have the diary of an Egyptian officer who travelled in Western Asia in the fourteenth century, B.C., curiously like the stories told by modern tourists in Europe; and then from Herodotus to Marco Polo, Father Huc, Busbequius, and the host of modern travellers who have penetrated into all the regions of the earth. Interest in human life for its own sake has steadily increased. This interest shows itself, further, not only in the study of foreign nationalities, but no less in the attitude of men one towards another in the smaller communities. Residents in any comparatively small area are bound together by a thousand ties, feel that the well-being of each is inseparably connected with the well-being of all, have an intelligent and keen regard each for the affairs of his fellows, have, that is, a genuine sentiment of living unity. And this sentiment is coming to be less and less reflective and more and more instinctive,—it is born with us and is strengthened by all the experiences of our lives. We have almost reached the point of looking on a stranger as a friend rather than as an enemy. Delicacy of moral sensibility has advanced hand in hand with social union; men are more tenderly regardful of their fellows now than ever before. I am speaking here of the moral code and the conscience, not of the regeneration of the soul. This latter point, closely allied with the others, must yet be kept apart from them. Whether the human race has been undergoing a gradual sanctification, a fundamental purification of

nature, is a question that may fairly admit of discussion ; but to treat it at length would take us too far from our present line of thought. All that I mean to say now is that the generally recognized ethical code has become broader, higher, and clearer in the successive ages of human history, and that this growth is parallel to that of social combination of sympathies. And it seems evident that the relation between these two lines of advance is not merely one of coexistence,—each has constantly acted on the other, and it is particularly obvious that the moral code has been colored by the social relations. An instance in point is the law of international copyright ; so long as merely abstract principles of justice were appealed to, plausible arguments were made in this country on both sides and no conclusion was arrived at ; now that an approach has been made by us to such a law it appears that the real determining consideration is the closeness of relation that has sprung up between our publishers and authors and those of England and the continent ; as soon as we feel ourselves to be in the circle of the nations, we make an international law.

It is equally clear that all this progress has been accompanied by a growth in independence of the individual conscience. It is true that the members of society have become more closely welded together, and public opinion in moral as in other questions is now more influential than ever before. But we know that the man on his rational, conscientious side now counts for far more than he did in the early periods of human life. A growth of individuality is a well-marked social-political fact in history ; it has been treated at length by modern writers, its great historical turning-points described, and search made for its sources. Some writers dwell on the splendid outburst of physical discovery and mechanical invention during the past century ; others are disposed to find the roots of this phase of modern life largely in the commercial and military activity of the Middle Age ; to some it has seemed that Christianity has created individualism by ascribing priceless worth to the human soul and representing the salvation of each soul as the most cherished object of the divine love ; still others, going behind all separate institutions,

look to the interfusion of Græco-Roman and Semitic thought for the solution of the question. In all these answers there are elements of truth ; but their variety, the difficulty that attends the attempt to fix the beginning in any one historical era, indicates that these explanations are partial, and that the real answer is to be found in a wider survey of history. These great events are stadia in human progress,—the movement has been going on from the beginning, not unbroken or unchecked, but still on the whole a continuous advance. Stand where we will, we see that man is more master of himself than in some preceding period. Society becomes stronger, juster, more providential, and at the same time the individual becomes spiritually higher and more self-possessed ; conscience tends to be common but not communal. The individual man is more conscious of his fellows, but thereby comes to a truer consciousness of himself. In the sphere of ethics reflection takes the place of instinct, and at the same time instinct grows into larger, more symmetrical proportions and becomes more and more controlling. In a word, conscience tends to become autonomous. But the full bearing of this fact cannot be understood till we have looked at the other side of our question, the growth of religion and the way in which it has entered into man's moral life.

2. There was a time, as we have seen, when religion and ethics were practically identical because the personal object of religious worship was literally a member of the community out of which moral usages and ideas sprang. This state of things was not permanent ; it was acted on by two sets of causes, the one tending to perpetuate it, the other tending to set it aside ; the interplay of these two sets of forces is the history of practical ethics. In the first group belong all those institutions and tendencies which may be called conservative, their object being, consciously or unconsciously, to maintain the existing order of things in the interest of some supposed good ; such are certain forms of government, art, and religion. We must here confine ourselves to an examination of the religious forces, and these we may most conveniently consider in the form in which they manifest them-

selves in two great institutions, which practically sum up the religious thought and activity of the world,—the priesthood and sacred books.

The priesthood is a very old institution, but in accordance with our plan, we are not now concerned with its earliest history; it is enough to note that at a certain stage of human life there came into existence groups of men who were believed to stand in a very close relation with the deity and were recognized as the authorized expounders of his will and the intermediaries between him and men. So far as regards influence on religious-ethical life the details of sacerdotal constitution are unimportant; the priestly class, defined as the group of persons who act as mediators between man and God, is found everywhere, exists still, and has played an important part in the development of ethical thought. In the nature of the case its influence has been both good and bad. Its authority has been mediate and immediate, representative and personal; it has stood on the one hand for an idea, and on the other hand it has exerted a human, individual influence. So far as the *personnel* of the priesthood is concerned it has been on the whole neither better nor worse than that of other classes of men. Priests the world over have been fairly good men, according to the current standards of morality; in spite of their seclusion, they have never been able to withdraw themselves wholly from the ethical atmosphere of their time or from its deeper-lying ethical instincts and impulses. They have their peculiar temptations, as is true of all classes of men; they are often ignorant, selfish, impure, brutal, or ambitious, as is the common lot of man, but on the whole they face the problems of life bravely, and often use well their peculiar opportunities for giving moral and religious sympathy, support, and impetus. For this reason we have to consider them here not in their personal but in their representative character,—it is the priesthood as the bearer of an idea that we are dealing with. This idea is the presence and power of the deity in the community; the priest stands for religion and especially for organized religion. The sacerdotal class is withdrawn from the common pursuits of life, and has leisure

to reflect on its abstracter problems. Thus it tends to devote itself to speculation, to poetical, mystical, mythical lines of thought, and to the increase of its own power. Any such comparatively isolated group of men will develop both noble and ignoble characteristics, it will become both benevolent and selfish. And all sacerdotal class-characteristics will work together for the perfecting of the priestly organization,—speculation will endeavor to elaborate a system, pure religious feeling will strive to make religion a controlling power, and selfish ambition will attempt to build up a dominant priestly organization. The outcome of all this will be an effort to maintain the existing domain of religion and to extend it as far as possible, and among other things it will desire not to lose its hold on ethics. A central principle of priestly faith is that the will of the deity is the source of right, a principle which has lasted throughout history and has been sometimes helpful, sometimes hurtful in its influence. It has been a conservative, controlling power in times of disorder, in savage tribes, in the half-anarchy of medieval feudalism, in the barbarism of American frontier life; it has preserved and held up established principles of ethics at moments when human passion has tried to break down all barriers. On the other hand, a priesthood acts hurtfully on ethics in two ways: it coerces morals in the supposed interests of religion and it perpetuates outgrown moral customs and ideas. The first of these modes of procedure is of a sort not peculiar to the priestly class but common to all human organizations. The second has had a wide and important influence on the ethical history of the race. Not merely here and there, but everywhere and always religious customs which grew naturally out of a certain phase of society have been maintained and invested with authority, after the moral sense of the community had passed beyond them, through that organization of the religious life which has been under the control of priests. Hence has arisen in life a moral conflict of a very peculiar sort between antagonistic authorities,—reverence for the deified past and regard for the living present. Not that this is the only species of ethical schism in life; there is, for example, the struggle between religion

and the state, of which we have an exposition in the "Antigone" of Sophocles. But in the case of ethics and religion the strife has been sharper,—it is a fraternal war; the right must be by all tradition the will of the deity as set forth by his representatives, and yet the right must be the rule of existing usage. In such cases the moral advantage is generally with the later custom, and the priesthood lends itself to the support of immorality; but it must be observed that such discordances with the common ethical feeling are practised under a sort of protest and are only skin-deep,—they injure many individuals and retard without stopping the moral growth of society. An instance in point is the licentious worship of the Canaanitish religion, adopted and practised for centuries by the Israelites, sanctioned by the popular religion, abhorred and denounced by the higher moral feeling of the time as expressed by the prophets. Here a large part of the priesthood put itself on the side of what was morally bad; but the history shows that the bad yielded gradually to the steadily increasing pressure of the general moral sense. We may take this record as giving a fair history of the ethical element in the orgiastic religious ceremonies of Greece, Rome, and other parts of the world. A subtler form of immorality shows itself in the conflict between faith and scepticism which inevitably rises in a growing society. The priest has to guard his own faith and that of his people. It sometimes happens that he himself doubts and knows that they doubt, and his worldly interests incline him to crush the doubts,—whence much intellectual and moral sophistry. Such seem to be the principal ethical elements of priestly influence; on the theoretical side the identification of right with the will of the deity; on the practical side, the upholding of the general moral standard, but also the perpetuation of worn-out ethical creeds and the debauching of the conscience by crushing rational thought.

The influence of sacred books is akin to that of the priesthood; they are indeed as a rule largely the work of priests. They have a certain ethical-religious coloring peculiar to themselves, but the main direction of their ethical power is substantially the same as that described above. What is peculiar

to a canon is that it commonly takes its ethical-religious material not from any one class but from the whole body of moral-religious thinkers, and that it precipitates and petrifies thought into an enduring, authoritative mass. It is the verbal incarnation of the deity. It has a fixedness and an authority that do not belong to the fleeting utterances of living priests and prophets. It has also the flexibility which pertains to all human speech. With these characteristics its moral-religious influences connect themselves; it is an eternal, unchanging standard of truth which nevertheless permits itself to be interpreted in various ways. In point of fact sacred books have arisen in comparatively early stages of social development, in those periods of genial, unfettered enthusiasm which precede the times of reflection and philosophy. They thus (with the exception of the Buddhist books) embody the idea that the deity dwells with the people, enters into their life, and is the source of all their ideas and laws. So far as they base moral life on something outside of and alien to man, they strike at the independence of the conscience. So far as they perpetuate an ethical code which belongs to some one period of development they raise a barrier to moral progress. So far as they create the temptation to bring their utterances into accord with later thought, they produce intellectual and moral disingenuousness. On the other hand, since they are in the main the work of morally pure and advanced minds, they offer a standard of life which must for a long time be higher than that of the mass of men, and they maintain a firm and vigorous moral rule in the midst of the vagaries of individual thought and the upturnings of social life. The illustrations of these principles furnished by the history of the Bible and the Koran are too familiar to need mention.

The educational power of these two institutions has been enormous. Taking their rise in the young manhood of the race, commending themselves by their real nobleness of character, and recognized as having divine authority, they have had the effect, along with the vast good they have done, of entailing on later generations relatively crude moral concep-

tions. As far as we are concerned, our whole world has felt their power. Greece and Rome, it is true, had no sacred books; but no sooner had the one fashioned its literature, art, and philosophy, and the other worked out its social organization than both hastened to ally themselves with another race, whose priests and sacred books they accepted as the divinely given guides of the moral-religious life. If we except China and India the whole civilized world professes to-day to draw its ethical-religious nourishment from Semitic books whose composition began almost three thousand years ago. The general result of this feature of modern society is, as has been pointed out, the partial perpetuation of relatively crude forms of moral life.

3. So far we have been looking at those elements of social life which tend to maintain the old communal form of religion. Let us now examine the opposite set of influences, those whose aim has been to establish different relations between ethics and religion,—not to divorce the two, but to define the sphere of each, to recognize the human origin of the moral code, and to develop the conscience in a human way.

The whole education of the race has tended to this result, for human progress has been in the direction of recognizing law in phenomena, and that is equivalent to recognizing the independence of the human conscience. The dominion of law in the moral and physical spheres means a knowable and definable sequence of phenomena; and this, in conjunction with the consciousness of freedom, forces on man the conviction that it is his part to discover and accommodate himself to moral principles. The discovery of these principles constitutes the development of the ethical code; the accommodation to them constitutes the growth of conscience. But man cannot do this without acquiring the consciousness of moral creative power and independence. That such a consciousness has come to a section of the race is matter of fact; and on looking back through the records of history we can see, even in the small space of time that is known to us, that there has been in the main an advance in this regard. The cause must be sought in man's instinct of reflection, the

necessity that is laid on him to observe the sequences of phenomena and to discover the laws by which they are controlled.

This tendency in human life is illustrated by certain movements of thought the object of which has been to isolate ethics from religion,—that is, to treat it as a purely human fact. The first of these movements in order of time is that which is identified with the name of Confucius. Whether he stands alone, or, as is more likely, represents the outcome of a considerable period of thought, he gave shape to a system of practical ethics which he deliberately kept apart from supernatural agencies,—a system which has maintained itself alongside of and over against popular ancestor-worship, the official State religion and the Chinese form of Buddhism, and was and is the creed of educated Chinese. Confucianism is an attempt to isolate the purely human side of morals, and there is no reason to refer its rise to anything else than the conviction that human moral life has its basis and its safeguards in human nature. The system is eminently of the earth, earthy; it regards social intercourse as the end of life; its ideal is a community permeated by prudent and intelligent kindness, and the reward it offers is social happiness. A very different conception of life is offered by Buddhism, the next of these movements in chronological order. Not the enjoyment of social life but its annihilation is the Buddhist ideal,—a suicidal scheme for the destruction of passion and will. Nevertheless this deace of will, which it makes happiness, Buddhism practically identifies with moral perfection, hopes to attain it only by moral training, and reaches about the same ethical standards as Confucianism, only with the deep sense of self-annihilation. The Chinese virtuous sage accommodates himself to his fellows in the interests of the general well-being and in order to fashion himself into a perfect social instrument; the Buddhist saint conforms to his moral ideal in order to lift himself into the sphere of what he conceives to be the final stage of human development. Though their theoretical conceptions of the functions of the human will are so different, the two agree in finding the secret of happiness in conformity

to the moral law and in drawing the rules of right conduct from purely human observation of the structure of society. The Greek philosophers, from Socrates on, approach the subject from a different point of view, their controlling aim being to give scientific unity to the world ; but, whether they regarded phenomena as copies of originals in the divine mind, or studied ethical principles in relation to man's soul and surroundings, it was from the observation of human life that they derived their ethical standards, and it was in man's own convictions that they placed the foundation of moral obligation. The same practical result was reached by the Arabian thinkers of Bagdad and Cordova, who for four centuries worked out their own scheme of life under the guidance of Aristotle,—a scheme which came partly through the Jews and partly at first hand to the medieval Christian theologians, and powerfully influenced European thought till it blended with the Humanist revival of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries ; through all this long period under much obscurity of philosophical and theological dogmas we can see a steady effort to grasp the purely human side of ethics, to find both the material and the obligation of the moral code in the structure of man's mind and in his relation to his fellows. These are the great historical movements ; there must have been many smaller ones, there must indeed have been fainter attempts of this sort throughout history. We cannot here go into an analysis of these movements ; we note their existence as a finger-board of progress. They occupy a very large space in the moral-intellectual life of the world. The traditional view, that the substance and sanctions of ethical law are of supernatural origin has maintained itself, though with constantly lessening distinctness ; the other side of the question, namely, that man is the author of his own ethical life, has been urged by a succession of serious thinkers whose names are inseparably connected with great forward movements of human thought. What is the actual historical outcome of this apparent schism in the mind of man ?

III.

I can only indicate in the briefest way the results to which our survey of the facts points.

In the first place, there is the steady advance of society in moral elevation and in moral authority. Compare the public moral judgment of to-day with that of the times of David, Jeremiah, Socrates, Clement of Alexandria, George Buchanan; there can be no doubt on which side the advantage lies. So as to the authority of the public conscience; there is no man in the civilized world, not outlawed, from the Emperor of Japan to an American ward-politician, who doesn't feel that there is a master over him flourishing a visible ethical whip. This may seem to be a mere extension of the clan-morality above described. But it is more than this, different not only in extent of authority but also in ethical attitude and tone. It is a development of the old system, but a development into something much higher. It is more thoroughgoing and complete in its ethical survey, taking account of nicer moral points, in accordance with the growth in the moral law. Then, the old communality has become practical universality, and that means that man is looked on, not as a member of a tribe, but as a human being having his own independent rights. And this again involves the transformation of the old blood-kinship point of view into an ethical one; society has now come largely to judge all men's actions by the highest recognized moral standard. And finally, a point that must be especially insisted on is that society has come to be an efficient moral guide and support. It has worked out great ideals which have become the heritage of a small but controlling section of the race. It offers great rewards for well-doing and inflicts terrible punishment for ill-doing. The individual is not a moral orphan in the world; society stands to him in place of a parent, with all of a parent's power, and none of a parent's weaknesses. This, at least, represents the goal, as ethical history shows, towards which the race has been moving. But what will be the result, it may be asked, if a man is cut off from society? That is a state of things that we are not called

on to consider. A few unfortunates are buried, wrecked, or outlawed; they must depend on such moral and religious support as remains to them in their inheritance of the common human feeling. But the mass of men belong to society, and our scheme of human life must be based on the perfection of human relations.

In the next place, religion has moved away from the conception of the tribal god. The Jews before the beginning of our era gave up the national name of the deity, Jehovah, and took instead some universal term, as "God" or "The Holy One." A similar step was taken by the Greek philosophers as early as Socrates. The tendency of thought has been against anthropomorphism in the idea of God, and against the supposition of divine infraction of natural law. This tendency is visible throughout the history of the church. At the present day, for example, it is a widespread view in orthodox theological circles that the person of Christ is at the same time wholly divine and wholly human. It seems but a step from this position to the wider view that the world is at once wholly divine and wholly natural. This latter conception means, of course, the absolute dominion of natural law in the moral world. It means that moral law is divine, that God manifests himself in the struggles of man's conscience, that the moral nature of God is known to us only through the moral nature of man. This is the position held to-day by a large and increasing number of moral-religious thinkers who are intensely interested in the solution of the moral problems of life. For such persons God enters into all human experiences in a living way, a blood-kinsman like the old clan deity, but unlike him standing not in physical isolation and mere fleshly comradeship,—standing rather in closest spiritual union with man, sharing his spiritual struggles and urging him with profoundest sympathy to ceaseless moral-spiritual endeavor.

Thus the end to which human moral history points is a conscience absolutely independent and yet absolutely dependent,—independent in that it refuses to recognize any other authority than its own ideals, dependent in that it receives its ideals from the life of man which is the highest revelation of

God. This is an attitude which, experience seems to me to show, promises the greatest moral strength and happiness. To some it may seem to cut away the foundations of moral life; but there are many to whom it will appear to furnish the truest moral stability in resting on the divine self-manifestation in human experience.

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THE RIGHT FINAL AIM OF LIFE.

WHAT is the right final aim of life? To answer a question correctly, we must understand it completely. But the meaning of this question does not seem to be immediately clear. We must therefore analyze it. We have to ask, (1) "What is meant by 'final aim'?" (2) "What is meant by 'final aim of life'?" and (3) "What is meant by 'the right final aim of life'?"

We will begin by considering the first question.

1. The whole of those consequences of an action which are foreseen and willed by the agent are together called the "intention" of that action. As a rule, not all these consequences are directly desired, but only a portion of them; and this portion of the intended consequences is called the "aim" of the action. The causes which have to be put in operation in order to the attainment of this aim are called the "means." They too are willed (but not directly), because the aim is attainable only through them; and thus, if an aim can only be realized through a long chain of causes and effects, every member of this chain may itself, in its turn, become a relative aim, in so far as it is conceived and willed and realized by means of causes other than itself; whereas the ultimate aim, which is not subservient as a means to anything further, is called the final aim. An action which achieves its final aim is successful; one which misses it is unsuccessful. The certainty of attaining the final aim would be enough by itself to